

The Authority of those who watch for souls.

A

# S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

INSTALLATION OF REV. SAMUEL G. COE,

AS PASTOR OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY

IN

DANBURY, CONN., DEC. 4, 1850.

BY

THEODORE D. WOOLSEY,

President of Yale College.

SECOND EDITION.

NEW HAVEN:

PRINTED BY B. L. HAMLEN,

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## P R E F A C E.

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AT the request of several ministers, in whose wisdom the author places high confidence, a second edition of this ordination sermon is now issued. Besides one unimportant alteration, a whole paragraph has been omitted in this edition,—that relating to the minister's influence in admissions to the church and in discipline. The reason for omitting this paragraph is not that the author has changed his opinion since he wrote it, but that it will not command more than a partial assent and may therefore tend to weaken the influence of other truths, which are taught in the discourse.

The discourse has called forth some animadversions, as was to be expected from the position it takes with regard to the authority of ministers. These animadversions would receive a respectful notice and examination, if the occupations of the writer did not render such a thing quite impossible. Meanwhile he may be permitted to doubt whether there is as much difference between him and his reviewer as the latter imagines; whether any intelligent person can fail to find in the New Testament the doctrine that Christian ministers possess an authority, and that authority a *jure divino* one,—not indeed over a particular congregation until elected to it, but one, which no compact of minister and people can lawfully abridge.

At all events our Congregational and Independent fathers did not build up their system on the denial of such authority. And to show this to be the case may the author be allowed to append one or two passages,—no more are consistent with the brevity of a preface,—from John Cotton, John Owen and the Cambridge Platform.

The latter in 1680 thus speaks in Chapter x, § 7.

“Church government or rule, is placed by Christ in the officers of the church, who are therefore called rulers, while they rule with God; yet in case of maladministration, they are subject to the power of the church, as hath been said before. The Holy Ghost frequently, yea always, where it mentioneth church rule, and church government, ascribeth it to elders; whereas the work and duty of the people is expressed in the phrase of obeying their elders, and submitting themselves unto them in the Lord. So as it is manifest, that an organic or complete church is a body politic, consisting of some that are governors, and some that are governed in the Lord.”

And again, in § 11.

“From the premises, namely, That the ordinary power of government belonging only to the elders, power of privilege remaineth with the brotherhood, (as power of judgment in matters of censure, and power of liberty in matters of liberty;) it followeth, that in an organic church, and right administration, all church acts proceed after the manner of a mixt administration, *so as no church act can be consummated or perfected without the consent of both.*”

From many passages in Dr. Owen’s treatises on church government I select the following.

From ‘a Short Catechism with an explication upon the same,’ vol. xix, p. 529 of his works, London, 1826.

“*Quest.* 28. Wherein principally doth the authority of the elders of the church consist?

“*Ans.* (1.) In that rule of the church and the guidance thereof in things appertaining unto the worship of God, is committed unto them. And therefore, (2.) Whatever they do as elders in the church according unto rule, they do it not in the name or authority of the church by which their power is derived unto them, nor as members only of the church by their own consent or covenant, but in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, from whom, by virtue of his law and ordinance, their ministerial office and power is received. So that, (3.) In the exercise of any act of church power, by and with the consent of the church, there is an obligation, thence proceeding, which ariseth immediately from that authority which they have received of Jesus Christ, which is the spring of all rule and authority in the church.”



From "the true nature of a Gospel church and its government," Works, xx, p. 503.

"There is power, authority, and rule granted unto and residing in some persons of the church, and not in the body of the fraternity or community of the people. How far the government of the church may be denominated democratical from the necessary consent of the people unto the principal acts of it in its exercise, I shall not determine. But whereas this consent, and the liberty of it, is absolutely necessary according to the law of obedience unto Christ, which is prescribed unto the church, requiring that all they do in compliance therewith be voluntary ; as unto the manner of its exercise, being in dutiful compliance with the guidance of the rule, it changeth not the state of the government. And therefore, where any thing is acted and disposed in the church, by suffrage, or the plurality of voices, the vote of the fraternity is not determining and authoritative, but only declarative of consent and obedience. It is so, in all acts of rule where the church is organical, or in complete order.

"That there is such an authority and rule instituted by Christ in his church, is not liable unto dispute. Where there are bishops, pastors, elders, guides, rulers, stewards, instituted, given, granted, called, ordained ; and some to be ruled, sheep, lambs, brethren, obliged by command to obey them, follow them, submit unto them in the Lord, regard them as over them : there is rule and authority in some persons, and that committed unto them by Jesus Christ. But all these things are frequently repeated in the Scripture. And when in the practical part or exercise of rule, due respect is not had unto their authority, there is nothing but confusion and disorder. When the people judge that the power of the keys is committed unto them as such only, and in them doth the right of their use and exercise reside ; that their elders have no interest in the disposing of church affairs, or in acts of church-power, but only their own suffrages, or what they can obtain by reasoning ; and think there is no duty incumbent on them to acquiesce in their authority in any thing (an evil apt to grow in churches), it overthrowes all that beautiful order which Jesus Christ hath ordained."

The venerated John Cotton expresses himself thus :

In "the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven," p. 34.

"Now, the *second branch* of the *Proposition* was, That the elders of the church of a particular congregation, are the first subject of rule or authority, in that church (or congregation) over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers.

“From the charge of rule over the church committed to them immediately from Christ: For though the elders be chosen to their office by the church of brethren, yet the office itself is ordained immediately by Christ, and the rule annexed to the office, is limited by Christ only. If the brethren of the church should elect a presbytery to be called by them in the Lord, this will not excuse the Presbyters in their neglect of rule, either before the Lord, or to their own consciences. For thus runneth the Apostle’s charge to the elders of *Ephesus*, (Acts 20, 28,) *Take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.*”

In “the Way of Congregational Churches Cleared,” part 2, page 22, (London, 1648.)

“But for the present stating of the question, our judgment is expressed in two conclusions; which so far as they are controverted, are to be cleared.

“First that the church of believers destitute of officers, hath received some part of the power of the keys: as power to receive members, to elect officers, and to do such other church acts, as do not require office-rule, or office-power.

“Secondly, that the church of believers, though for the present destitute of officers, hath in it a radical or virtual power, whereby it may call forth such officers, as may administer all those acts of office rule, or power, which of itself without them, it could not exercise.”

And in the “Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,” again, p. 35.

“If it be objected; How can the brethren of the church invest an elder with rule over them, if they had not power of rule in themselves to communicate to him?

“*Ans.* They invest him with rule, partly by choosing him to the office which God hath invested with rule, partly by professing their own subjection to him in the Lord: [which] by the rule of relatives doth necessarily infer, and prefer the authority of the elders over them. For in yielding subjection, they either set up, or acknowledge authority in him, to whom they yield subjection.”

Thus much by way of preface. It would rejoice the author, if the following discourse should be of some use in inculcating the truth, that there is a just mean between clerical lordship, and usurpation of authority by a congregation, which can not be departed from without detriment to religion; and that the nature of our institutions at present inclines us unduly to abridge the authority of the ministerial office.



## S E R M O N .

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*Hebrews, XIII, 17.*—Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

THE text which has just been read, affords very clear proof that those who watch for souls in the Christian church are invested with some kind of authority or power as rulers, and are to be treated with some kind of obedience or submission. The same persons were in the mind of the sacred writer when he wrote the seventh verse of this chapter: "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God;" from which we learn that these rulers are Christian teachers.

This subject of the Christian minister's authority in the congregation is seldom discussed in the pulpit, and that for a variety of reasons; among which I may mention that the claim of just power is not well received in this country, and that the urging of such a claim seems to imply a difference of opinion which may end in a collision. The ordinary danger in a democratic country like ours is not that the magistrate will overstep the just limits of authority, but that he will be checked in the exercise of his constitutional power, by an unhealthy public sentiment, which pleads the rights of the people and the principle of self-government in favor of insubordination. And so, if there be in any sense of the word ecclesiastical rulers, they are dependent, at least among the churches of our order, for entrance into office in a particular place, for support, and for the effectual discharge of their lawful functions, upon the will of the church members. They have no independent power of excision from the church; no legal right, which is worth pleading, to remain in their place after the people have become dissatisfied; no aid of their brethren in the ministry upon which they can

rely in time of trial. For the sake of order, the advice of neighboring ministers or churches is asked when a minister is settled or unsettled; but the tendency of full-grown unchecked independency would be to put even the power of ordaining into the hands of the brethren of the church. There is then in the state, and much more among the churches, nothing to support authority in the last resort, but a conviction that authority is necessary for the well-being of society, civil or religious, and that submission to it is required by the word of God. And hence arises the necessity of enquiring what is the extent and nature of this authority. But, as I remarked before, ministers are not only without arms to resist unjust encroachments on their authority, but the discussion of such a subject, on ordinary occasions, would seem to argue, that the minister was not laboring at an abstract point of morals, but had a practical measure to carry, and wished to strengthen himself by taking the fortress of the conscience; or else that he had a natural love of power, which rouses opposition in the breast of a freeman. In either case there would be danger of a collision and of its unhappy consequences,—the spirit of animosity and a warping from the ground of truth.

No such good reason exists, however, why, on an occasion like the present, this subject should not be discussed. If some minds among my hearers are so jealous of the assumption of power as to attribute the choice of the subject to that motive, perhaps the speaker may claim, that having no pastoral office of his own, and no power to be propped up by false principles, being in fact, as far as his relations to the church go, bound to the same duties which he prescribes to others, he is not liable to that bias which might be supposed to influence ordinary ministers. Let me therefore ask your candid attention to what I have to say upon this subject, for I intend to treat of it with that candor which ought to awaken a similar spirit in the hearts of my hearers.

Let me however give you notice beforehand that my purpose is not so much to lay off the rights of ministers and duties of their people by definite rules of precise application, as to enforce the scripture injunctions, and make it appear to right thinking Christians that there is a duty in the case which they may not slight. Perhaps, definiteness is impossible: perhaps, if it be not, the application of the rule is most safely lodged in the breasts of Christians: perhaps the partic-

ulars under the rule, if specified, might draw attention away from the main point, and thus defeat the moral end which is to be kept in sight. It will be my main object then to draw your thoughts towards the general duty spoken of in the text, and to leave in great measure the special cases under the rule to the intelligence of my Christian hearers.

With these preliminary remarks I proceed to the text which implies three things.

1. That those are rulers in the Christian church whose chief business consists in watching for souls.

2. That the duties denoted by the words translated 'obey,' and 'submit yourselves,' are to be rendered to them by those over whom they watch, and,

3. That the account which these persons called 'rulers' will render to the Great Judge will be a happy one, or a grievous one for their flocks, according as their flocks discharge or fail to discharge the duties named in the text.

I. The first point to be considered is that there are rulers in Christian communities, and these rulers are they whose business it is to watch for souls. In other words, ministers or pastors are likewise rulers.

(1.) Let it be observed *in the first place*, that this truth is independent of the mode of their appointment. In this country, through all protestant denominations with one exception, the minister is selected by the voice of the congregation or church or both united. In many countries the right of nominating or of appointing him over a parish vests in a patron, whether lay or ecclesiastical. In the ancient church, some time after the establishment of Christian communities by the apostles or others, the custom was, as I think most probable, for the existing elders and the church members to have concurrent action, each in the appointment of new elders having a veto upon the other. Now, whichever of these plans is right, or supposing them all or none of them to be right it matters not; the mode of appointment, if accepted as a fact and acquiesced in, has nothing to do with the relation and rights of a pastor. Civil government here furnishes us with a good analogy. In some countries the executive officer is hereditary, in others elective; and of election there are various sorts. But no one doubts that as a general rule the magistrate is to be obeyed, while acting according to the existing laws. It is not necessary for our purpose, therefore, to enquire what is the right mode of appointing ministers, for



the mode of appointment will not affect the essence of their office.

(2.) Again, let it be observed, *in the second place*, that the truth contained in the text is independent of the relative importance attached to the different functions of the ministerial office. *We* hold it as a cardinal point and make no doubt of it that the minister's chief duty is to seek to lead the flock to God and to salvation by preaching the gospel. We also entrust in his hands exclusively the administration of the sacraments. Among *Roman Catholics* the latter is his great work, and the former is subordinate. Nay, baptism itself, as they hold, may be administered in cases of necessity by lay hands, so that the power to celebrate the mass is that preëminently, in which the virtue of the minister's (or priest's) office is exerted. In the ancient church, teaching and baptizing were the province of the elders or presbyters, although all of them did not of necessity teach; while the Lord's Supper may have been, at least in the times of the earlier persecutions, when the elders were cut off or had fled, administered by some of the private brethren. Now whatever opinion ought to be formed in regard to these matters, the truth contained in the text will remain unaltered. In all cases the person who watches for souls will have a prerogative, which deserves the name of 'ruling,' given to it by the apostles.

(3.) Again, let it be observed, *in the third place*, that the truth contained in the text is independent of the weight of character of the individual, derived from age, wisdom, experience, strength of mind or degree of Christian proficiency. It is impossible in any society, civil or religious, to deprive a man, formed for influence, of his due ascendancy over other minds. If he is an office-bearer or magistrate, he will have a power which renders an appeal to his rightful claims unnecessary: if he is a private church member or citizen, his advice will govern the magistrate, where discretion is permitted; and will shape the measures of legislators. And such men, when found in posts of authority, will be apt to think slightly of the exercise of power, which they enjoy in common with weaker men, and to value only that influence by which, without enforcement of law, they can control the mind. But such influence is merely personal, conceded by divine Providence to a few, at most, in each community, while that which is contemplated in the text is official, and not dependent on individual traits. Whether a given person

does or does not possess such sway over the mind, may be a reason for electing him or not electing him to the pastoral office; and the want of it, when marked and extreme, may be a reason for removing him from the office; but when once inducted, he enters into a relation and has claims growing out of the relation, which do not vary with individual differences of mental power. Otherwise the Apostle would not have used the general terms, "them that rule over you," but would have limited his rule to cases where these persons exercised a wide influence, and manifested a strong mind. The duty enjoined in the text, then, is incumbent on the most enlightened members of a congregation, and is to be fulfilled towards the minister, irrespectively of his mental power.

What has been said goes to show that the Apostle's words are to be understood of all who watch for souls, or the pastors of churches, however appointed, however the relative importance of their several functions may be estimated, and however they may differ in talents or acquisitions. We are now prepared to look at the *fact* that such persons are denominated *rulers* by the Apostle. The propriety of this appellation may be vindicated *by other passages of scripture* where equivalent names, or precepts implying similar authority, occur, and *by the nature of Christian society*.

The limits of time proper for this service will not allow me to examine, with the due degree of care and minuteness, into the Christian teacher's authority, as it is exhibited in the scriptures. Happily this examination may be rendered in a measure unnecessary, by the fact that all intelligent Christians, in reading the word of God, have had their attention called repeatedly to this point, and cannot have failed to form an opinion, in the main correct, upon the subject. It may suffice then, instead of a long discussion, to say here, that Christian ministers are called *elders* or *presbyters*,—a term at first appropriate to *advanced age* but afterwards to *official station*, into which the older men were apt to be called;—*overseers* or *bishops*, which in the New Testament is a term used indiscriminately with elders; and *leaders* or *guides*, the sense of which is plain. They are said *to rule* and *to be over* the people; to have an office of which that of *shepherds* is a natural type; and be entrusted with a power which may be abused by unworthy ministers, to gratify their ambition or cupidity. This last particular is deserving of our especial



regard, for if our Lord warns his apostles against being called *masters* because one is their master even Christ, and if the Apostle Peter warns elders against acting as *lords over God's heritage*, surely the power of Christian elders was so considerable that it might be easily perverted.

History shows that such precepts were disregarded; and that by degrees a stupendous system of spiritual despotism arose, the central idea of which is the existence of a body of men, who act as mediating priests between God and man. But such a despotism, which is heaven-wide removed from the exercise of just sway, could not have arisen without the previous existence of just sway, on which it could fasten itself and out of which it could grow. Tyranny and usurpation imply lawful power strained beyond its just limit, or lodged in wrong hands. Some who contemplate the strides made towards priestly domination, within a century after the death of the last surviving apostle, would knock down the fabric of ecclesiastical government: but with equal reason they should, like some innovators of our time, oppose civil government, because it may be oppressive. They cannot, however, blot out of the New Testament the testimony in favor of both kinds of order, and the obvious leaning towards constituted power.

Again, the nature of Christian society shows that there must be rulers in the church. I acknowledge that *Christian* differs from *civil* society in several important respects. Its members, with all their imperfections, have the prevailing spirit of love, peace, and order. There can therefore be little need of government where all is harmony, and where that spirit of deference and humility exists, which the Apostle calls 'submitting one to another.' The office too of civil government consists chiefly, though by no means exclusively, in maintaining personal rights and enforcing obligations, which are sharply defined, and therefore capable of being ascertained. There are no such rights and obligations, properly speaking, in religious society; but only duties and reasonable claims, which must be by their nature indefinite, and subject to the decisions of the conscience and judgment. And I am willing to acknowledge also, that where definite rules can be applied, religious society is far more capable of governing itself without officers, than are the fractions of which civil society is composed. But after all, the same reasons in kind, if not equal in degree, exist why govern-

ment is needed in both societies. In both, without government, there would be strife, disorder and isolation. In both there is the same instinct of organization, if I may so call it; for *civil* society, when agitated and revolutionized, always reassumes some organized form, and *religious* society began to take form and shape under officers at the very first; and when men separate from hierarchies on account of oppression, or from other platforms, on the allegation of scripture grounds, it is but to make a new society with rules, settled arrangements, and persons to administer them. Even the Friends or Quakers, whose aim has been to approach the nearest possible to the apostolic church, of the time when spiritual gifts imparted diversely were the means of bringing up Christians from their semi-chaotic state of new life, and who might be supposed to trust every thing to inward suggestion and nothing to rule,—*even they* are obliged to have some kind of order and organization.

There is another important thought, which I wish to introduce here. Christian society involves the existence of one or more men, whose duty it is to watch for souls. If there is to be anything like government in the society it ought to be in *their* hands, and *their function of watching for souls requires* that they should be invested with government. Here are two propositions, the first of which will hardly be disputed, after the express direction of the Apostle, ‘obey them that rule over you, *for they watch for your souls.*’ Let us look at the other for a moment, considering the nature of this care of souls, which is attributed to rulers in the church.

When the claim of priestly intervention is made, by a party in the Christian world, we are apt to feel indignant at it, and to say that there is no man between us and God. And it is true that there is no man who can claim the office of *mediator and priest*, seeing there is ‘one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus,’ and ‘by his one offering, once for all, he hath perfected for ever them which are sanctified.’ But we forget the important truth that there are men between us and God, and that if it were not so, the whole framework of life would require alteration. Thus the parent is between God and his child; the magistrate between God and the people; the teacher between God and the pupil; the pastor between God and the flock. And this intervention or representation is needed to fit the persons, on

whose behalf it occurs, for the better discharge of their duties towards God; to train them to be healthy members of the several communities with which they are connected; and to place them in situations where there shall be fewest obstacles in the way to heaven. Thus the magistrate is God's instrument for rendering a community orderly and just; the parent God's instrument for training up his children in a course of virtue and piety; and so of the others. And hence, if there were no magistrate, or he were neglectful of his duty, there could be little or no justice and order in society; and a similar remark is applicable to the other agencies. Nor does it matter how these various agencies are appointed. The elected magistrate is as truly God's minister as if he received his commission by inspiration: the parent intervenes as well between God and the poor orphan whom he adopts, as between God and the children of his body. Applying this now to the pastoral office, we say that it is an institution of God's devising, the holders of which, like magistrates, parents, or teachers, stand between God and a particular Christian society, in order that by their intervention the people may receive the full blessing of the gospel of Christ. There is no other lawful means of compassing this end, and though a people who should discard the ministerial office ignorantly might not entirely fail of God's blessing, we ought to expect that they who should do this knowingly and with their eyes open, would be abandoned of Him. In other words, the pastoral institution is necessary to the maintenance of Christian society. The members, as *separate persons*, are in no favorable situation to promote their spiritual interests, and there is no organization which can be a substitute for that which now exists. The progress of society has brought us no nearer than the first Christians were to doing away with the pastoral office. A church with the due degree of influence exerted by the various members, and with the Bible and religious books but without a minister, can no more thrive spiritually, in the long run, than a community can thrive civilly with a society for mutual protection and with law-books, but without a magistrate.

Now this position which a pastor takes between God and a people, as the agent to promote their spiritual interests, involves a certain amount of power, a certain right to superintend and direct in regard to those spiritual interests. How can he differ in any manner from the private church mem-



bers, how can he, in any higher sense than they, be appointed to watch for souls, if it be not his province to have a controlling voice in all those religious measures which affect the community. I do not say that he is required to act arbitrarily or without advice. Nay! on the contrary, one element of his success will lie in his knowing what counsel is good, and in taking it. He cannot avoid seeking and taking counsel, unless he is cased in brazen self-conceit. And in questions of expediency, where the right time or the due degree is in deliberation, if there is a stronger mind than his in the congregation, it will govern. But it ought to govern through him, not over him; just as a wise lawyer will control the opinion of the judge, and not take his place on the bench. But *this*, I think, results from his office of watching for souls: that he is to decide in the last instance what is the best way of discharging his duty, and of course that it is wrong for any one to interfere with or seek to thwart him; or in case of difference of opinion to imagine that his opinion,—he being a private member of the church,—ought to be put on an equality with the pastor's; or to complain and feel injured if it be not followed.

But to the duties of the flock towards the pastor we shall presently call your attention. First, however, it becomes us to answer a question which may naturally be asked as to the extent and exact nature of this pastoral power. Can it be defined and specified in its particulars? In answering this question, I must first remind you of what was said at the commencement of the discourse, that it might be in itself an indefinite thing; and that it was not my main design to specify the modes in which this power is to be exercised, because I trusted more to the Christian conscience, receiving a general rule of action, than to particular rules engraven on the memory. If however any should still demand to know some of the heads under which this power may be embraced, I will answer in the briefest manner possible. *First*, the pastor is to determine what to preach. If he to whom in His providence the head of the church has committed the watch over souls has not this included among his prerogatives, I am unable to see that he has any. If there is a watchman, or if there are watchmen watching over him, whose word is to be law, they are the true watchmen for souls, and he is a mere subaltern, a mere puppet. But some one will say, what if he preach false doctrine or fail entirely to edify? I answer

by asking what if a legitimate ruler act oppressively under the constitution? What is then to be done? You answer that the constitution is not so valuable an interest as the ends are for which it was established; that a change of government may be found necessary. Even such may be the necessity in the case before us. But then our text teaches us by its spirit at least, that this is to be looked on something in the light of a revolutionary measure. Not that every difference of opinion as to doctrine, every degree of want of satisfaction, may constitute a valid reason for putting an end to the pastor's watch over souls. The conscience of each church member ought to keep him from expressions of displeasure, and from publicly questioning the wisdom of his pastor's measures, lest he interfere with him in his watch over souls, lest he prevent the truth from coming home to men asleep in sin, with whom it is a common plea that the preaching is unprofitable.

Again, *in the second place*, the minister ought to command his pulpit. This flows out of his right to determine what to preach. Or it may be derived directly from his office 'as the appointed watchman over souls, which lays upon him the duty of bringing such subjects, and treating them in such a manner as he judges best for the good of his flock. Of course, if another person should bring unprofitable and harmful topics before the people in his pulpit, or treat them in an inexpedient way, he could not be the watchman over souls, but another is installed in his place. There may be times in the history of the church when men after their own lusts will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they may wish that these teachers and their own pastor may form a partnership in the work of watching over souls; but such is not God's system, and certain it is, that if the pastor can be disturbed in his just rights here, his hopes of usefulness will die, his power of usefulness will be destroyed.

II. I have now reached the second main division of my discourse, which relates to the duties to be rendered to the ruler or officer in the church. '*Obey*,' says the Apostle, and '*submit yourselves*.' The words are clear and rendered from the original with sufficient exactness; and yet perhaps they express something more of subjection than the original will warrant. The word translated 'obey' may be used to denote the obedience yielded to God, parents, and magistrates; and yet I doubt whether any thing more is here in-



tended than 'be complying,' 'do what your spiritual rulers say,' referring to taking them as spiritual guides, and especially to receiving their instructions as the rule of life. The word translated 'submit yourselves,' denotes the opposite of that unyielding insubordinate spirit which sets itself up against authority and counsel, and strives after the possession of separate and rival power. It is as much as to say you ought to have the general character of yielding and deferring in spiritual thing to your rulers, since it is theirs to watch for your souls.

Let us look at these duties here enjoined more particularly. In the first place then, and negatively, the Apostle does not demand of private Christians that they surrender the rights which churches exercised in apostolic times, or their Christian liberty, or their right of private judgment.

As to the *first* of these three points it is perhaps enough to say that he is inculcating a state of mind,—the exercise of a proper temper; and cannot fairly be supposed to require such submissiveness as would abandon existing institutions. But I hardly need mention such a thing as possible to exist among us. All the signs point in the other direction, towards taking from ministers their scriptural authority, and subjecting them to a control inconsistent with the free exercise of their own judgments, and with the best interests of religion. There may be ground of apprehension in other denominations that the spiritual power lodged in ministers' hands is too great; but it is more likely in ours to be made a question whether there shall be any ministers at all. At all events, so long as the minister has no control over temporalities, being dependent on his people for his bread; so long as the parish invites him and displaces him without great difficulty; so long as they have a voice in the admission of new members and the discipline of the old; so long it is clear he has an interest to obey and submit to them rather than the contrary; and that he has no lever, except texts of scripture like the present, by which to remove the weight of dependence bearing upon him, and acquire a proper share of authority.

Nor, *again*, does the sacred writer require of Christians by this demand of obedience that they surrender their religious freedom. Spiritual despotism has played so large a part in the external history of Christianity, has so corrupted to its very core religious doctrine, and bent all the energies of those who should be its defenders to schemes of selfish

ambition, that the experience of Christendom, the events through which our fathers and the founders of our churches past justify us in dreading it. We ought to see to it that there are securities against encroachment on religious freedom, whether by law or in practice. And it may be doubted whether some Protestant denominations, even in lands where men are free to associate for religious purposes as they will, may not need and are not destined to go through a revolution, which will take some power out of the hands of the clergy. But, as we just now remarked, our system, built as it is on the independency of a particular congregation, and knowing nothing of associations of ministers as an *essential* thing, places all tangible and material power in the hands of the people, and sets over against them the minister, to stand alone without a band of brethren as his defenders, and aided only by moral considerations. Religious liberty is not likely to be sacrificed in a state of things like this. Nor ought the words of our text to be made to embrace such a power over consciences as will amount to a *virtual* surrender of religious freedom. I am willing to grant that the indefiniteness of the rule is such, that under circumstances favorable to clerical domination, it may be stretched too far on that side, just as now and among us the rule is exposed to become a nonentity. And so other kinds of legitimate power have a limit, beyond which when carried they are pernicious. Even parental, the most obvious and necessary kind of human power, has been exaggerated by the laws of one country into a portentous control over the child for life or death. But the remedy for such excess of clerical power lies in institutions like ours which render it exceedingly difficult, and in the intelligent interest of the people in church affairs, which causes them to become a moral force, to have a weight of opinion which must be respected by a minister.

I add, *in the third place*, that the text does not require of the people to surrender their right of private judgment, whether as to the system of truth or as to measures of practice. It would be a strange inconsistency indeed, if a rule amounting to this could be found in a book, which makes intelligent faith in Christ a condition of salvation, and requires of believers to search for and to prove the truth. Nor is it possible in the nature of the case for an educated Chris-

tian, with the Bible and other religious books in his hands, with the power of observing human nature, and with eternal responsibilities upon him, to avoid making up his own mind as to what religion is and what the word of God means. Still less can he fail of passing a judgment upon the religious measures pursued in the parish, where most of the decisive considerations are quite within his reach. To give up the right of private judgment, then, is neither required nor possible.

Let me, however, here interpose the remark that many appear to me to be deceived in regard to the nature of the right of private judgment. They seem to suppose that any man, however ignorant, has a right to form his opinion independently of all other persons whatever; that, for instance, in regard to the meaning of scripture, he may just take the Bible in hand, and without asking advice or attaching any weight to the opinions of the intelligent may build up his own system of religious truth. Now this is a very perverted view. I have indeed no right to force my opinion upon another, because judgments of the mind are personal, intransferable, acts; but that other has no right to treat my opinion as valueless, if he believe me to be wise and good; and to act as he would, if he were the only being in the universe. None but the smallest children do this in practical matters; and it is a proof of being a babe in Christ, when a Christian shows the same spirit in the formation of his opinions. We are members of one another for purposes of the intellect, as well as for benevolent action. No man can entirely separate himself from his race, his age or his country; and they who claim most independence are oftenest enslaved to some force which they do not perceive. It is a strong argument in favor of any doctrine, that good and wise men whom we know fall readily into it. But when we spread our view, and find that there are doctrines which good and wise men have always deduced from the scripture, that must be a very strong argument of their truth to the most powerful, the most self-capable mind. I desire for one not to be a thinking atom, but to ally myself in this respect to the community of saints: only I must use a wise moderation and be on my guard lest my independence of thought be crushed, lest I annihilate my power of mind, and act as if the judgment of others were my *only* ground of forming opinion, instead of being but *one* ground, and that not of course the most important.



The considerations here laid before you will enable us to pass to the affirmative answer of the enquiry, what is meant by the words 'obey' and 'submit yourselves' of the text.

*In the first place*, then, the words denote that the religious teachings of the pastor are to be received with deference, and with respect for his opinion. This perhaps, or something like this, was probably the main thought in the mind of the sacred writer. The pastor being appointed by God to think and teach in the department of religion for the congregation, cannot discharge his duty profitably unless he be met by a readiness to receive truth upon his authority,—by a propensity to accept his explanations of the word of God. It is expected of them as of *all* pupils that they place themselves under their instructor with some such feeling as this, that his declarations are to be one ground of belief, and that they presume what he says to be true. They are to confide in his testimony concerning the truths and obligations of religion, with something of the same relying spirit with which they confide in the testimony of a good man concerning matters of fact. This is the spirit with which the people should receive the minister's instructions; and this is not an unquestioning, unreasoning spirit, it is no blindfold groping, with the guide at your elbow, but, as I hope to have shown, perfectly consistent with the due exercise of private judgment. Without this there may be much intellectual discipline, but there will be little moral fruit of the preaching. If the faculties are awake only to sit in judgment upon the statements uttered from the pulpit, what can there be of that teachableness which is so much commended in the scriptures. Do you say that the pastor can make use of this acquiescent submissiveness of mind to preach error and undo souls? True, but cannot the parent, cannot the teacher of every intellectual branch do the same. The relation is constituted by God with this liability to evil. But we shall not regard the evil likely to arise as very serious, if we reflect, *first*, that after all, the judgment of the individual *will be* exercised; and, *again*, that errors imbibed through the proper confidence and deference which we speak of, are not apt to be very harmful. For they are received *not* in the spirit of opposition to the truth, but in the exercise of right feeling, *not* through the influence of partisanship, but through that of the relation which the pastor holds to the flock. They are therefore, perhaps, of all errors the easiest to be displaced and to lose their sway, when

other light is admitted into the mind. Some would like to see congregations, *all at once*, untie the bond of confidence to their minister when he is charged with heresy; but in our judgment, a Christian temper ought to render them *slow and cautious* in admitting evidence of heresy against one who has heretofore guided them to God by the gospel.

*In the second place*, the measures which the pastor may see fit to adopt for the promotion of religion ought to be accepted and seconded. I speak not now of a duty, correlative to those positive rights which he possesses of preventing other teachers from usurping his pulpit or otherwise intruding within his field. But I speak of his discretionary movements in cases where he is to decide in the final instance what he must do, and what he must call upon the church to do. That he will set about such measures,—which by the way include much of his efficiency in his sphere of labor and many actions which are delicate or difficult,—without advice, is not to be supposed, if he is a sane man. Even a despot has about him his Aulic council, or his cabinet ministers. And not even a despotism could exist, is the despot judged and resolved on every thing by the unaided powers of his single mind. But supposing him now to have formed his plans of usefulness, I say that the text demands that he be not thwarted and interrupted, but rather followed with cheerful unanimity, even by those who may not think the measure the wisest which could be adopted. And I say, also, that opposition to him on the score of the wisdom of his measures ought not to be lightly commenced, above all by one or two church-members however prominent; that it ought to be reserved for extreme cases, after urgency in private has failed; and that its existence otherwise is a mark of the refractory, unsubmissive temper which the text condemns. If this be not so, it will be difficult to find any conduct which goes counter to this scriptural precept, and the precept will become practically unmeaning.

Many of the cases where a minister without his own fault is in collision with members of his own church involve direct violation of the duty here mentioned. A minister in the discharge of an undoubted obligation is pursuing a certain course of measures for the good of his flock. Some member of the church thinks,—we will suppose with reason,—that he has misjudged, and that his plans will be



unattended with good. He tries,—we will further suppose,—to bring his pastor into his own way of thinking, and is unsuccessful. So far all is right, and Christian. And with the same Christian spirit he may possibly stand aloof and decline to take a part in what he cannot approve, content to let him decide whose province it is, and to commit the result to the trial of time and the decision of Providence. But suppose now that instead of doing this, he should go about the parish censuring the minister's motives or depreciating his judgment; suppose that he should feel alienation from him, and even bitter alienation; that he should attempt to gather a faction in order to make his influence felt; that he should obstruct the success of measures the failure of which he had predicted, and adorn his willful opposition with the sacred name of conscience; suppose that he should proceed to the length of making his minister fear him, that thus he may govern him; or to the length of making him uncomfortable in his position and willing to seek a change;—suppose, I say, such a course of hostilities waged, if you please, not openly, but under the forms of plausible underhanded decorum;—is there any right-minded man who would not say, not only that such conduct was unchristian, as causing evil, but also was a violation of duty towards the pastor and a sin against plain scripture?

This evil proceeds obviously from an abuse of the liberty of the Congregational system, and is analogous to some abuses of large civil liberty, only that it causes the more mischief in the smaller community of religious professors, in proportion as each individual there has more of the whole amount of power. The remedy for it lies not in dividing a church, or in expelling members who cause divisions, or are fountains of bitterness, or as often happens in the withdrawing of the disaffected to another community. For *the first* of these methods may be a source of more abundant ill; *the second* ought never to be resorted to except as an extreme act of rigor towards those whom no kindness will win, and no reasoning persuade; while *the third*, when adopted out of pique, is positively unchristian. But the remedy lies in being well aware what is the relation of the pastor to the people as settled by Christ,—what the people ought to do rather than what they can do,—and in possessing the spirit which seeks not to govern but to spread the power of the gospel, which feels itself to be 'free but uses not its liberty as a cloak

of maliciousness,' which 'honors all men,' and 'especially esteems very highly in love for their work's sake,' 'them who are over' a people 'in the Lord.'

I add, *in the third place*, as a topic deserving of reflection, that, in order to fulfill their duty, a people ought, more than is usual at present, to regard their minister in the light of a watchman of souls placed over them by divine Providence, rather than in the light of man possessed of such and such abilities and weaknesses. In other words, it is not his talents or his peculiar traits of character, which ought most to occupy their minds, but his function as a religious guide. And this remark I make, not in order to attach a sacredness to the office of pastor which is unreal and hurtful, but to place it on its right footing that it may be respected accordingly; just as I would exalt the office of magistrate or of parent by considerations connecting it with God's moral system upon earth. If we look merely at a minister's learning or eloquence or wisdom in counsel or kindly affections, these qualities will have their influence upon us, just as they would in any other profession. But if we stop there, we fail to perceive that he is God's ambassador to us, the watchman over our souls, from whose guardianship while he is our minister we cannot withdraw. It seems to me that Christian feeling will lead us to entertain this view of the pastor's office; and when we have adopted it, we shall find our duties towards him easy of discovery and easy of performance. We shall then be careful lest any ill-advised conduct of ours obstruct him in the discharge of his guardianship, by lowering the opinion of him in the minds of others, or by discouraging him. We shall then feel that fidelity in his office of watchman is more to be valued than any qualifications with which the God of nature may have endowed him; and shall be less anxious to hear ingenious sermons than to see him earnestly occupied about the spiritual interests of his flock. This fidelity at his post in all the departments of ministerial duty is what the Apostle means by 'ruling well,' when he requires that double honor be paid to elders who sustain that character. And truly in a thoroughly Christian community, the disposition to honor such ministers, before men of talents or learning, would be no inconsiderable motive to steady, unpretending continuance in those noiseless labors, of which there may be no great fame out of the parish, but which build up the kingdom of Christ more than burning eloquence or the wisdom of serpents.

Such are some of the heads under which the more indefinite duties of the people denoted by the words 'obey' and 'submit yourselves' may be classed; and such some of the considerations which will aid in the performance. To the more positive and precise duties, corresponding to what may be called the *rights of the pulpit and of the pastor*, I need not call your attention, since, if once the nature of the minister's authority is determined, they will follow of course.

III. Let me now ask you to reflect for a few moments upon the third and closing point, which is that the account which ministers will render to the Judge will be a joyful or a grievous one, according as the people perform or fail to perform the duties named in the text. Obey and submit yourselves, that they may give an account with joy and not with grief.

A Christian mind connects actions and their issues together, and feels that time is as it were the mother of eternity. It is a small matter for an irreligious mind if one minister is removed and another succeeds; if factions arise and peace flies away from a parish; if the pastoral office is treated with contempt and irreverence, so that the man of God must fall back on his merely personal means of influence, being bereft of that which he derives from sacred station. I say all this is a small matter for an irreligious mind. The trade of the place is just as brisk as before, the world is as prosperous. It did not hurt the market, probably, to show contempt or insult towards Paul himself. But the man of a sober mind, who feels that he must take heed how he hears, who knows that the success of the ministerial office is bound up with regard to a man as a messenger of Christ, who knows that the usurpation of power, a factious spirit or censoriousness may break down a pastor and destroy a congregation, *he* will feel that it is a serious thing, and one for which an account is to be demanded by the Judge, how he treats his minister; and that joy or grief will be his portion according to the nature of the account.

The minister, too, has an account to render of his stewardship; and there is joy or grief in store for him according to his nature. To this the Apostle Peter alludes in the passage already cited, beginning with 'feed the flock of God which is among you,' and closing with the words 'and when the chief shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of



glory which fadeth not away.' And for this account the Christian pastor will ever be making preparation. He will, sometimes, almost hear the Judge putting to him the terrible question—What hast thou done in the ministry where I placed thee?—and will see the Judge severing the ungodly minister from the godly at that great day of reckoning. And the terrors of that day will utter a voice to deter him from sloth, and to check him in the disposition to make his pastoral office a secondary business, to which at times he may be tempted. As a watchman over a treasure for which thieves are lurking about, he will fear for himself lest he be invaded by sleep, or be caught off his guard, and will cry mightily for aid.

But the account spoken of in the text is different from both of these. It is a report, presented by the pastor to the Chief Shepherd, how the flock have treated the under-shepherd to whom he assigned a particular fold. It is a solemn testimony concerning the character of the flock so far as its relations to the minister are concerned, uttered not in the language of hopeful charity, but in the language of retributive truth. In this report will be inserted not the good opinions which the minister may have formed as to the members of his congregation; but the exact statement how they have treated his message and himself. And this report may be rendered with joy, or with grief,—joy or grief aroused in the affectionate minister's heart by unerring recollections of the past, which, running through the whole course of his ministry, shall attach themselves to the individual persons who have been under him in the Lord. The minister may stand before the master and Judge, and with gladness of countenance may say, "Here, Lord, I come to tell thee what indeed thou knowest well, but what this dread solemnity of the judgment, where heaven and earth are assembled, requires that I should unfold. I went in among this flock in weakness and trembling, following the guidance of thy providence, but not knowing what was before me in this new sphere of my labors. Exceeding great is my joy this day, that I can testify that 'they received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.' They felt that I was an 'ambassador for Christ, as though God did beseech them by me;' and thus associating me in their minds with my errand, and with him who sent me, they 'esteemed me very highly in love for my work's sake.'

When I spoke to them of God 'in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses,' they gave ear and honored my testimony by their acceptance. In the church they walked orderly, as becometh the gospel. No one, out of a desire to have a preëminence among them, sought to undermine my just authority, as a minister of Christ; or to cause division among a united flock. While they 'searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so,' they showed a readiness to believe and obey what I taught them, which cheered me in my ministry. And as for that general respect which a Christian people will show towards the ambassador of Christ, as for their proofs of love and confidence and desire to lighten my labors and contribute to my comfort, thou knowest, O my Judge, that these far surpassed my estimate of my just claims; that it constantly humbled me that one so imperfect and so unworthy was treated with so much honor."

Something like these will be the heads of that joyful report which the minister may render concerning a Christian people. What a joyful one for him to give, what a joyful one for them to hear concerning themselves. And O! if he needed to make no exceptions, if there were no insubordinate, gainsaying, factious and unbelieving ones, of whom he would be required to bear another testimony, what an unmingled, unshaded delight would arise in his soul. Yes, if every member, even of the church bore this character, how joyous would it be for him, how profitable for them at the last day.

But your minds have already anticipated, that truth may force the minister, when standing as a witness and giving in his report before God, to use very different language. Gladly would he evade the sad necessity of testifying against his people, did not justice and truth urge him to the disclosure. "I am not conscious," he will say, "that my infirmities of temper or unfaithfulness, or any fault ought to have prejudiced my ministry in the eyes of this people, and yet, as thou knowest, they neither received my word, nor treated me as became a messenger of Christ. I 'preached repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;' but great multitudes cared nothing for these things:—they obeyed not the word; and now I testify this day before thee, that I am not responsible for their destruction, 'for I did not shun to declare the whole council of God.' Others of them



were professed disciples of Christ. But they thwarted my measures for doing good: they never gave me their countenance, nor followed me, but rather looked on with sullen silence. They sought to have the lead in the parish, rather than as members of a body to move in harmony with the rest, and yield to me my proper place. They gave no heed to admonitions: they were insensible to my kindness: they overlooked or misinterpreted my fidelity. I testify therefore this day, that they had a proud, censorious, self-willed spirit, —one which discouraged me, and led me to utter loud cries and tears to thee who didst place me amid such trials.”

My brethren, to a benevolent mind justice is often a grievous though a necessary thing. We cannot well conceive how full of grief will be the just testimony of the minister against the people for whom he labored and suffered. Oh! if it should be necessary, as the epitome of a long ministry, to utter such sad things against his flock, if the results of a lifetime should be a testimony in condemnation of immortals, what grief which we know of here on earth would come up to the level of that grief which he would feel. And how unprofitable would it be for the flock. Better for them ‘not to have known the way of righteousness, than thus to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.’ Better for them to have had no minister than to have despised and slighted him and his message, for a Judge is on the throne, who has said ‘he that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.’

My brethren, see to it what account you will oblige your minister to render concerning you in that day.









